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ABSTRACT

Alternatives in coping with the problems related to declining enrollment in rural school districts were explored in a study undertaken in 1976 by a special committee appointed by the Iowa Association of School Boards. Over a two year period the 18 member committee examined enrollment, finance, curriculum, facilities, faculty, mergers, and other appropriate matters. In four two-day meetings the group heard from a wide variety of witnesses, including state legislators, school administrators, university experts, school board members, and state officials. A number of strengths as well as hazards were identified. Small districts (below 800 enrollment) offered certain advantages, including more opportunity to participate in a variety of activities, more chance to develop leadership skills, stronger community involvement, a higher level of teacher satisfaction, test scores equal or better to students in larger districts, and more stability in graduates in terms of further education and employment. Merging of small districts may provide a "grace period" from the problems of declining enrollment but will not eliminate them. Problems will intensify for small districts and long range planning should be undertaken for every small district. The present headcount system of funding should be modified to compensate fixed costs which persist even as enrollment declines. This document summarizes the proceedings at each of the meetings, lists resource material and contents, and gives the conclusions and recommendations formulated by the committee. (DS)

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RURAL EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE

IOWA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BOARDS

1976-78

Report

NOVEMBER 16, 1978

RC 011261

Iowa Association of School Boards
707 Savings and Loan Building
Des Moines, Iowa 50309

This report was put on paper by Ferne Bonomi, communications director for the Iowa Association of School Boards, from notes made at the meetings of the committee. It was reviewed first by the drafting subcommittee, and then by all members of the committee, with additions or modifications as a result of their responses.

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OVERVIEW

THIS COMMITTEE came into being as the result of a resolution enacted by the Delegate Assembly of the Iowa Association of School Boards on October 28, 1976. At the time, statewide legislation to mandate reorganization of small districts was in the offing. Schools were feeling the financial pinch of declining enrollment under a headcount system of funding. The Delegate Assembly thought it timely for small schools, themselves, to study their situation and their options. A two-year study was established.

The committee includes two members from each of IASB's nine director districts. All are from school districts with less than 800 enrollment, kindergarten through twelfth grade. Seventeen are school board members; one is a superintendent.

The committee met four times, in April, June and September of 1977 and in February, 1978. A drafting committee met in June, 1978, to consider recommendations. The final report is made to the Delegate Assembly convening November 16, 1978.

The committee early declared themselves to be "seeking alternatives, not directives nor mandates in coping with the effects of declining

enrollment." "We view reorganization as only one of the potential alternatives", they said, and, "We hereby undertake a serious study of the other alternatives."

Committee members looked at the hard data on enrollment trends and school taxes. They heard from the Superintendent of Public Instruction and the State Comptroller. University professors who have made a special study of rural education came in to share their thoughts. Legislators who were sponsoring reorganization bills outlined their reasons. A school board member and a superintendent who lived through county-wide reorganization related their experiences. Board members from two districts which recently merged reported on that process. A letter came in from a "wallflower" district which can't negotiate a merger. An Area Education Agency administrator suggested ways to improve efficiency through cooperation. Merged area school officials described demonstration projects in cooperative programs in north central Iowa. A member of an AEA committee studying reorganization summarized their observations. A small school superintendent highlighted his doctoral study on the quality of education. The committee reviewed the Great Plains study of 1966-68, and the Governor's Committee report of 1971, especially with regard to quality of education.

Committee members talked about their own course offerings, their shared teachers and their concerns. One explained how his district shares a superintendent with another district. They studied a statewide IASB survey of schools which now have joint programs or are sharing personnel, and the attitudes toward such approaches.

The committee discussed attitudes in their own communities, and the school's place in community life. They found their own viewpoint broadening, and perspective changing, as the study proceeded. They debated how to

transmit this process to other school boards, and to the communities they serve. They brought in university experts who charted the way in which new ideas are adopted or rejected, and the factors which influence change or resist change in a community.

They identified a number of strengths, and some inescapable hazards, in small school systems. Looking ahead, they see problems intensifying. They express a need for long-range planning in local districts. They conclude that small districts need a standing resource of advice and ideas. They first considered this as a function of IASB, but decided the most appropriate place would be the State Department of Public Instruction.

Most of all, members of this committee urge their fellow school board members in small rural districts to keep a constant watchful eye on the substance of education being offered in that district, and take whatever steps are necessary so that students there are properly prepared for the life ahead of them.

RESOLUTION ESTABLISHING THE RURAL EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE

Adopted, Delegate Assembly, Iowa Association of School Boards, October 28, 1976

14-C That a special committee be formed by IASB to perform a two-year study regarding rural school districts. Such study should include enrollment, finance, curriculum, facilities, faculty and other appropriate matters. Data gathered in this study would be provided to local school districts for their use in long-range planning. Such committee is to be composed of two members from each of the IASB director districts. The appointees shall be from school districts with less than 800 students K-12. The appointments shall be made by the Board of Directors of the Iowa Association of School Boards. (1976)

MEMBERS, RURAL EDUCATION STUDY COMMITTEE

Jim Wilcox, RR, Cleghorn, board member, Meriden-Cleghorn Community Schools;
Arvid Baughman, RR 2, Newell, board member, Newell-Providence Community Schools;
Deane Gunderson, Rolfe, board member, Rolfe Community Schools;
Bill Myers, Alexander, board member, CAL Community Schools;
William Burrow, RFD 1, Tripoli, board member, Tripoli Community Schools;
Jeanne Allyn, Garnavillo, board member, Garnavillo Community Schools;
Gene Boechman, Carnavon, board member, Wall Lake Community Schools;
Thomas Yates, Holstein, board member, Holstein Community Schools;
Marcia Miles, R 1, Booneville, board member, Van Meter Community Schools;
Harold Townsend, Baxter, board member, Baxter Community Schools;
Dale Proctor, Stanwood, superintendent, Lincoln Community Schools;
Harold Meyer, RR, Olin, board member, Lincoln Community Schools;
Ronald Walter, R2, Prescott, board member, Prescott Community Schools;
Bob Beckendorf, Walnut, board member, Walnut Community Schools;
Venetah Tubaugh, Route 1, Moravia, board member, Moravia Community Schools;
Donald Ewing, Route 2, Lineville, board member, ACL Community Schools;
Paul Custer, What Cheer, board member, Tri-County Community Schools;
Robert Humphreys, Crawfordsville, board member, Winfield-Mt. Union Community Schools.

RESOURCE MATERIALS-- ADVANCE

Resource materials provided to each member of the IASB Rural Education Study Committee for advance study included:

- Summary, Great Plains School District Organization Project 1966-68, 11 pages

This study, which many persons view as recommending districts of "at least 3500", actually contains many more moderate comments. For instance, on page 153, the report says:

> Although 500 students in a three-year secondary school is generally recognized as the minimum enrollment for acceptable breadth and quality of selected educational programs, the application of the time-distance factor may necessitate smaller attendance centers.

Pupil transportation time should not exceed one hour, one way, for 90% of the transported pupils, the Great Plains study says. "Educational opportunities must be equitable-- not the same for all, but equitable in terms of individual needs, interests and capacities."

- Quality in Education, Chapter VI, Great Plains Project, 8 pages

The problem of defining quality is recognized. "It is conceived in the mind of each person as relating to that which, to them, is high in excellence of content or performance, and that which they covet for themselves or for others." "Ten Keys to Quality" as defined by Dean Schwarz of the Drake University college of education, relate quality to what is available to the student-- professional staff with high qualifications, instructional media, specialized services (psychological, social work, counseling, speech and hearing therapy, health, remedial, special instruction). Measurement of quality by outcome also is discussed--graduates who continue their education, participate actively and positively in the world of work, can engage in problem solving, develop a positive pattern of values which sustain them as individuals and as members of society.

- Improving Education for Iowans, Full final report of the Governor's Educational Advisory Committee, 1971, 136 pages

This report stressed citizen participation through advisory committees in local districts, to broaden citizen understanding and provide two-way communication with school officials; accountability, stressing output measurements more than input criteria; vocational education; the "community school" concept and intergovernmental cooperation.

FIRST MEETING-- APRIL 12-13, 1977

ALL EIGHTEEN MEMBERS of the committee gathered at Hotel Savery in Des Moines for the first two-day meeting. They introduced themselves by the size of their district (380 . . 220 . . 391 . . 350 . . 750 . . "it's small" . . 550 . . 330 . . 470 . . 770 . .) and their experience on the school board (five years . . six . . first year . . eleventh year . . fifth . . first . . twelfth . . seventh . . seventh . . sixth . . first--but board secretary for sixteen years . . ninth year . .)

Conversation turned to concerns. "How small is too small?" "There's no magic number." "I don't like a set number. The people in the district know if they are doing a good job or not." "I'm concerned about offering a course like chemistry. That's expensive." "What's wrong with sharing a teacher? Two schools seven miles apart have the same foreign language teacher and split the cost." "You don't save money that way." "Why not transport the interested students? That's better than reorganizing the whole school" "Teachers don't want to move." "There's a time to move teachers and a time to move students. . . we take the guidance counselor to the students, but we move the students for FFA" . . .

"NO MAGIC ANSWERS," STATE SUPERINTENDENT SAYS

Dr. Robert Benton, state superintendent of public instruction, came in and explained that he had asked for a chance to speak to the committee.

"There are no magic answers," he said. "It's time in Iowa that we take a look at the way we organize and should organize to deliver the educational product in a meaningful and qualitative way, and somewhat efficient way..."

"In the past five or six years, declining enrollment and the way we finance our schools have brought new dimensions, and urgency, to the question... Enrollment has been declining two percent a year for three or four years. Ahead, we can see three or four percent, maybe five percent, statewide. It will not be long before the circumstances will be extremely difficult to deal with. We cannot ignore the phenomenon..."

"The 200-student range is the break-even point in my opinion, educationally and financially. There are not enough in any one grade to have efficient operation."

He recalled the 1950s, when a minimum of 300 enrollment was established by law. He outlined the recommendation of the School Budget Review Committee, which would update that law to a minimum of 1,000 and let the grass roots approach be taken on the actual formation of the district. That would give a high school of 300 to 350 pupils, he calculated. "I like 700 to 750 better," he noted, "but that will give good variety and not require an unreasonable geographic area. And the state board could waive the requirement."

In further discussion, Dr. Benton said:

- He endorses the idea of a commission to deal with decisions about school organization, because it is too volatile an issue for politicians, and "not every place is the same."

- "The School Budget Review Committee, which I chair, gets about 200 appeals a year, and have been told by countless local boards that they can't bring about change at the local level."

- "Make decisions in terms of what's good for kids. Not towns, areas, or teams."

- "Remember the district of 1000 pupils now will be down to 600 in ten years. The high school of 100 pupils now will be 50 . . . 40 . . . 30 in time."

- "Will reorganization save money? No. Give better quality? I think so, given the right decision."

"BETTER QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SMALLER SCHOOLS," JESS SAYS

An opposite view was presented by Dr. James Jess, superintendent of CAL community schools headquartered at Latimer. As part of his doctoral studies, he examined 18 rural school systems, ranging from 200 to more than 2000 students.

Small schools-- those with fewer than 750 pupils-- provide better quality education than the larger districts, he concluded.

He found the smaller schools have lower dropout rates and more graduates who are employed or go on to higher education. There was little difference between smaller and larger schools on standardized test scores, he said.

Larger schools in his study had a lower cost per pupil, more course offerings, larger pupil/teacher ratios and higher teacher salaries.

Smaller schools were seen as more satisfactory by students, teachers and parents in terms of educational opportunity, preparation for later life, interpersonal relationships, recognition, decision-making, and personal and professional growth.

LEGISLATORS GIVE BACKGROUND OF PENDING MEASURES

Legislation occupied a share of the committee's attention at this meeting. Ten weeks earlier, on February 2, 1977, a public hearing on reorganization had drawn an audience of 1000 to the Statehouse. Seventy speakers filed requests for floor time. They cited evidence supporting smaller schools and strong opinion against mandated reorganization. The bill in question, SF 300, which would have mandated a minimum size for school districts, was debated in the Senate the day the committee met, and members spent part of the day in the legislative halls.

CONVERSATION AND COMMENT: APRIL, 1977

(Remarks by individual members of the committee during discussion)

Discussing reorganization with Dr. Benton:

"This is not a burial committee for small districts!"

"Why not come up with 'either-or' solutions? Farmers are bull-headed. I'm one. I lead a lot better than I follow. Let's say the state does so much and no more. Let the district set out the alternatives. Let the people make a decision, and choose."

"Hurdle #1 is what students gain from school, and a fear about discipline. People read about the bad kids in bigger districts. It makes news."

"Hurdle #2 is athletics. An important part of a school. Is that good or bad? It's real. It deters reorganization."

"Athletics, I feel, is as important to a child as any facet of education. 'Sound body, sound mind.'"

"Area education agencies have responsibility to consider reorganization. Think about the urban background of most AEA board members. They are handicapped in judging reorganization. They do not perceive the feelings and considerations of small rural school districts."

"There are 'rural' schools of 900 enrollment and more. I don't agree to a minimum of 1000 enrollment but we shouldn't be afraid of 1000."

Discussing Dr. Jess' study on small schools:

"Smaller schools have lower dropout rates, and so on. Is it all the school, or is it the family environment in the smaller community?

During their own sessions, committee members were briefed by the bill's sponsor, Sen. Earl Willits (D-Des Moines), and by other legislators who were involved with measures pending in the House of Representatives: Reprs. John Patchett (D-North Liberty), Wally Horn (D-Cedar Rapids), Keith Baker (D-Linn Grove) and Del Stromer (R-Garner). No legislation mandating reorganization or minimum size for school districts was enacted, and the proposals died with the close of the 1978 session, so further discussion is omitted. Some provisions of SF 300 were incorporated into other enacted bills.

TOM YATES NAMED CHAIRMAN; COMMITTEE SETS ITS DIRECTION

The committee elected Tom Yates of Holstein as permanent chairman. He had presented the original authorizing resolution at the Delegate Assembly.

To formulate a statement of direction, Chairman Yates asked the committee to work in four smaller groups. Discussion crystallized into the following summary of the committee's position:

Summary of position after first meeting, April 12-13, 1977, Des Moines

As representatives of the smaller rural school districts throughout Iowa:

- --We are seeking alternatives, not directives nor mandates, in coping with the problems related to declining enrollment;
- --We value the positive aspects which are presently found in Iowa's smaller school systems in rural areas, and take note of the pertinent research;
- --We are deeply concerned about maintaining quality education in our schools, under the present system which limits school funds to a fixed amount per pupil;
- --We think the state's responsibility for maintaining quality of education is more properly expressed through setting and enforcing educational standards than in legislating the number of pupils in a local school district;
- --We view reorganization as only one of the potential alternatives for school districts in which enrollment is declining;
- --We hereby undertake a serious study of the other alternatives, including steps already taken by some Iowa school districts, and any other creative solutions which appear promising for offering up-to-date educational opportunity in rural Iowa;
- --We will seek an evaluation of their experience from school districts which have reorganized or have rejected reorganization;
- --We solicit ideas and experience from any school district which appears to merit consideration and dissemination;
- --We perceive unique characteristics in the people and communities of rural Iowa, which deserve to be reflected in their educational system;
- --We believe that the citizens and patrons of a school system should be heavily involved in planning for the future of the school district.

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RESOURCE MATERIALS ADDED IN APRIL:

- Economy, Efficiency and Equality; the Myths of Rural School and District Consolidation, Jonathan Sher and Rachel Tompkins, 36 pages, publication of National Institute of Education. Included in later book, "Education in Rural America", edited by Sher.

Sher and Tompkins contend that the 'conventional wisdom' which eliminated more than 112,000 school districts since 1930 could be wrong. Transportation costs offset or outweigh the economies of size, they say; higher administrative costs wipe out any savings from bulk purchasing; researchers find no correlation between size and achievement; great inequities remain regardless of size. Students in small schools participate more and are more satisfied with their involvement. Three lessons: Small schools deserve more attention, and research should be directed at maintaining and improving existing small schools. Alternatives, such as regionalizing expensive programs, should be considered. Research done to demonstrate the value of practice "should be scrutinized very carefully."

- Summary, Conclusions and Recommendation for Further Research, Chapter V, doctoral study, James Jess, superintendent, CAL Community school district, 16 pages

The investigation concerned itself with analyzing the current state of affairs of Iowa's public elementary and secondary schools in regard to the five principles developed by the Governor's Committee (1971) in "Improving Education for Iowans". Eighteen school districts were tested, the same districts selected for the 1976 LEAP study for the Iowa legislature. One group consisted of schools ranging in enrollment from 191 to 748. Another group contained districts with enrollment from 1000 to 1999. The third group included the county-wide districts in Iowa. Data was from DPI reports, direct contact with the districts, and questionnaires among students, parents and teachers.

- Public School District Enrollment, low to high statewide and by AEA area

Basic Educational Data Survey, showing 259 school districts with enrollment under 800, ranging from 145 to 793, another 190 districts with enrollment from 801 to 38,842. (Sept., 1976)

- Iowa Public School Data, Administration and Finance, March 1977, 25 pages

Data from Department of Public Instruction, showing for each high school district the average daily membership, assessed valuation, assessed valuation per child in the ADM, the millage levy for the general fund and schoolhouse fund, and the general fund expenditure per pupil, and the current per-pupil cost (not counting capital outlay and debt service).

- General Fund Expenditure Computation, Administration and Finance, March 1977, 79 pages

Data from Department of Public Instruction, showing for each school district and each county, the ADM and the dollar and percentage amounts spent for instructional salaries, instructional supplies, health, transportation, fixed charges, operations and maintenance, other school services, community service, capital outlay and debt service.

SECOND MEETING-- JUNE 15-16, 1977

CONVENING FOR the second two-day session, the Rural Education Study Committee first heard from Dr. William Dreier, Professor of Education at the University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, who said "rural education and the local school district have been my special concern for over 25 years."

THE "SMALL MAJORITY" AND OPPORTUNITY FOR EACH CHILD

A "small majority" exists in many aspects of our culture, Dreier said; small churches, post offices, towns and farms outnumber the big ones, and of our 449 Iowa school districts, 87% enroll fewer than 2000 students. Considering the future of this "small majority" of school districts, he raised questions of curriculum, cost and opportunity. He cited a rule of thumb that high schools should offer at least three times as many courses as are required for graduation-- or 48 one-year units in four years. Only 1/6 of the Iowa school districts under 1000 enrollment met this test in 1972, he said. However, he noted that in the region, 1174 schools of under 500 met the standards of the North Central Association.

He noted that even in the famous Conant study of 1959, favoring high schools with a graduating class of 100, the large schools ranked both best and worst, and the three small schools evaluated by Conant ranked 11, 8 and 8-- very close to Conant's overall average of 8.9 for all sizes.

Among the reasons for supporting small school districts, Dreier mentioned "in America we recognize individuality . . . we must allow and support smallness and protect it from being overwhelmed. Small school districts should not be made to assume the same solutions which often have brought new problems city and metro schools."

He quoted Thomas Green of Syracuse University: An essential part of growing up is opportunity for the child to try out leadership roles somewhat like those he or she will encounter later in society. If the school is too small, it will be unable to provide opportunity to explore a variety of roles. If it is too large, the number of opportunities <u>for each child</u> will be less. "Somewhere in between, there is a size for the school that will maximize the opportunities for <u>each</u> child." Dreier said he thinks this size falls somewhere in the "small majority" under 1000 students. Quality of life is the concern in Iowa in this decade, he said, and small towns have become growth places because of their environment, economy and ecology.

Prof. Dreier traced the history of the earlier occasions on which the legislature has asked citizens to change their concept of an "adequate" school district: In the 1912-1942 "consolidation" era, a minimum of 16 square miles; in the 1952-62 time of "community" school districts, a minimum of 300 students. "In neither case was much attention given to the larger problems of the community, the area and the state," he said.

People in a community need and use a variety of community services, he said: education, law enforcement, health, recreation, communication, library, culture, transportation, child care, housing, care for the elderly. Community development should take this into consideration. Every community needs a school and to be a part of a larger community meeting the educational needs of young and older adults. The county is not a natural larger community, he declared; services should be organized around "significant" villages and towns.

TWO COUNTY-LIKE SCHOOL DISTRICTS-- FAIRFIELD COMMUNITY, DAVIS COUNTY COMMUNITY

Turning their attention to county-like school districts, committee members heard the history of Fairfield Community schools from Roy Lamansky, Pleasant Plain farmer, who served on a reorganization study committee in 1955-56, then on the Pleasant Plain and Fairfield boards, and now is an AEA 15 director.

People in the smaller communities said "We'll be swallowed up-- people in town will run everything," Lamansky recalled. "But my kids, and a lot of other rural kids, were homecoming queen, class officers, student council members. I had one boy in football. Another, who lost a leg in a power take-off accident when he was 11, wrestled on the varsity team." He brought scrapbooks showing the prominence of rural students during the years his children were in school.

"We've solved a lot of our problems," Lamansky said. "It could have gone the other way. But we had a real good board, we got along well together, there were no factions on the board. We sold people on what we thought they needed.

"We had a lot of problems. We lived with them, and did the best we could, and solved a lot of them." He said the 2800-pupil system runs clover-leaf loop bus routes for rural students, including activity buses, for about 8% of its budget.

Also, the committee heard the story of the Davis County community school district, from Supt. Ed Hutchcroft. Twenty years ago there were three high schools, 63 elementary districts and 28 attendance centers in Davis County. Many children walked to school where teachers with 6-90 college-hour credits taught from six to nine grade levels. Reorganization passed in 1960 on a "platform" of improvement in educational opportunity.

The system now operates 40 radio-equipped buses including eight activity buses leaving school at 5:15, delivering students to their door; it spends about $320,000, or 15-18% of its budget, on transportation. Enrollment is about 1800. The community school band participates in activities of the small communities, and the boys' basketball team went to state tournament for the first time-- "that unites the community".

A 1977 MERGER: BOTH SCHOOLS GAINED, BUT DECLINING ENROLLMENT NOT SOLVED

Reporting from the most recent merger in the state, Laurens-Marathon Supt. Joe Halterman said the process was "a lot of work" but both schools gained. However, "declining enrollment is not solved by reorganization," he emphasized. "It merely postponed the agony a couple of years." Next year's budget is the same

as last year's, he said; they graduate 82 and admit 40. Robert Wolverton, former Marathon superintendent, said he welcomed a chance to change responsibilities; he is principal of the middle school in his former building. He cited gains in facilities, with the gym, football field, home economics and industrial arts equipment available to grades 6, 7, and 8. Bus shuttle between the two buildings was added. Mrs. Lois Olson, president of the Marathon board, related merger discussion over 12-15 years. The board questionnaired patrons on occasion, and waited until a clear preference for action emerged late in 1974. They kept citizens well informed by mail-outs and through the newspapers, and had open houses at the two schools in the final decision. After a 70% questionnaire return with 60% favoring Laurens, they went to election. "We didn't do it with the idea of saving money," she said-- "we gained curriculum."

DECLINING ENROLLMENT HAS SUBTLE EFFECTS ON CURRICULUM, DPI'S JOHN MARTIN POINTS OUT

John Martin, director of curriculum for the state department of public instruction, pointed out that declining enrollment has subtle effects on curriculum. The socialization goal of kindergarten is defeated when there is only one incoming kindergartener (as one district has) and boy-girl interaction in class doesn't work if there are only boys, or only girls, in that grade level in the district (as sometimes happens). He suggested multi-age groupings, which 70 school districts in Iowa are using--mainly larger districts, so far, he said. He brought in data on Iowa schools of various sizes.

Average number of units offered in districts under 500 K-12 this past year was 40.88, up from 34.37 in 1968-69. In districts 500-749 K-12, the average number of units offered is 46.94, up from 38.57 in 1968-69. Twenty-six course offerings are mandated by state law; all need not be offered each year.

Purely from a curriculum standpoint, and disregarding all other valid considerations, he said the most efficient size of district would be 1000-1500 allowing several sections of class per grade level. Concerns about really small districts are the isolation of teachers who work all alone in their fields, and the fact that students get all their math, or all their science, from only one teacher without exposure to different minds.

"AREA EDUCATION AGENCIES SHOULD BE SALVATION OF SMALL SCHOOLS"-- PAT KELLY

The word "reorganization" should be abolished, and be replaced with "cooperation", Pat Kelly, administrator of Green Valley AEA at Creston, said. "Reorganization should be the least of our worries. You don't have to be big to be good." He said the reorganization of the 70s has already occurred, with establishment of the area education agencies, which are "the salvation of small schools, and they should be." He challenged schools to use AEAs more, and to consider: contracting for part of their requirements, using one personnel director per AEA to screen applicants, sharing instructional materials by scheduling use in sequence, letting effective teachers teach in more than one district, multi-grading, and using AEAs for curriculum development and writing proposals.

"Clearfield--the second smallest district in the state-- has the best reading teacher I know," he said. "Why not let her teach a reading conference for kids?"

CONVERSATION AND COMMENT: JUNE, 1977

(Remarks by individual members of the committee during discussion)

Discussing curriculum; number of credits offered:

"There's no way you can put a number on this thing. It's how well do you educate? When it hurts the children academically-- then aren't we willing to make a change?"

"You asked us to bring reports. When I got some-- major and minor fields of the teachers, courses offered, number of students enrolled-- I really got my eyes opened. Is this what goes on? This summer and fall we are going to be setting a list of priorities for our district, to correct some unwise hiring practices in the past, and get things on the right track. So many PE majors and minors. . nobody knew this . . ."

"Boards really don't know whether or not they have a good school or curriculum".

"We have our teachers at board meeting, to talk about what they are teaching". .

"Our board works on a committee system, committees for transportation, curriculum, and so on. Each member serves on two of the four committees each year, and they rotate every year."

"Are the boards back home really interested in what this committee is doing? There is a need to awaken rural school districts . . . get the people interested in what goes on in school . . ."

"I sense a different aspect of the board. People are beginning to wonder what is happening in education, beginning to question what we are really doing."

"Rural people don't want the legislature telling them what to do. . ."

"We need a different set-up for financing schools . . ."

"Every school situation is different. . . ."

"We have declining enrollment; we are sharing teachers, and a guidance counselor . . . How long can we keep up? As long as we can pay . . . We don't want to merge . . . the people want to keep their school . . ."

"Some big schools have lost as high a percent of enrollment as small schools-- Mason City, for one."

"We haven't been hurt by declining enrollment until now . . . our high school is paid for. We need grade school facilities, and have tried twice for a bond issue . . . we have a very good shop course in our school . . . the town will not want to reorganize with anyone else."

Any concept of "15 schools and 15 superintendents--the area education agencies" will NOT work, Kelly said, but cooperation and coordination of local school boards through the AEAs will provide better educational opportunities for youngsters.

He encouraged local districts to remember "the squeaking wheel syndrome" and ask for services and accounting from their area education agencies.

Going around the table, members of the committee shared notes on the curriculum and teachers in their own districts.

One example: "404 pupils, 51 course units, 27 teachers not counting administrators, 5 M.A.s, 6 B.A. plus additional hours, average experience 5.2 years of teaching."

Another: "380 pupils, we are sharing a superintendent this year. Four teachers for French and German, they circuit ride six schools, we have two in our school every other day. We are in the Hayes program for cosmetology and office procedures . . . a half-time ag teacher, who farms half-time."

"490 pupils this year, 5 M.A. teachers, some not teaching in their major field. We have quite a supply of teachers with P.E. majors or minors. We have 58 courses . . . 14 pupils taking child development, 5 in foods, 6 in clothing, 6 in singles living, . . . we have chemistry and vocational chemistry . . . I think our grammar mechanics in the English program are questionable . . . we offer voc ag and college prep agriculture."

"760 pupils, 43 teachers plus AEA help, two with less than B.A., five M.A., the rest B.A. or better. We offer 10 credits in English, 9 in social studies, 14 in math, 8 in science, 6 in art, . . . we dropped voc ag 10 or 11 years ago . . . we see a trend toward shop and away from science . . . credits in music but band is extra-curricular. . ."

As the June meeting drew to a close, Chairman Yates raised some questions as "food for thought" between then and the September meeting:

> "Do you think your school district can maintain your present program for the next five years?
>
> Over the next five years, can you maintain the present quality of faculty?
>
> During this period do you foresee, in your school district, that you can improve or expand the faculty in any way?
>
> Do you feel your board knows what your administration is doing in curriculum? Why you offer or don't offer courses?
>
> Should administrators discuss this with you at board meetings? (Answer: yes)
>
> Do you think there are a lot of other rural school districts where the board does not know about curriculum in their school?

He asked for discussion on "How do you view this committee?"

Committee members began to probe their own role. Should they attempt to have area meetings and share what they had learned? They recognized that the information they had gathered, and the process of discussion, was broadening and changing their own viewpoints. How to share that, back home? Or with other local school boards across the state?

Among other ideas, they decided to call in a team, for the next meeting, to outline the ways in which new information and new ideas move through a community, and the factors which influence change.

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RESOURCE MATERIALS ADDED IN JUNE

- The Small Majority--With Emphasis on School Districts, William H. Dreier, Professor of Education, University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls, presented to Arcturus Club, Cedar Falls, Iowa, May 13, 1977. 10 pages, with references.

- Notes on School District Reorganization in Iowa, 1975-2000, William H. Dreier, 4 pages (from an Iowa 2000 meeting).

- Text of remarks, Dr. Patrick Kelly, Administrator, Green Valley AEA, Creston, 5 pages.

- Proposal outline, Laurens-Marathon merger, one-page.
  Compares grade enrollment, faculty, area, indebtedness, valuation, budget, basic proposal with attendance centers and composition of school board.

- Average number of units offered in Iowa schools, grades 9-12, 1968 through 1977, by size groupings according to enrollment, and statewide average. One page. From curriculum department, DPI.

- Iowa Public High School Graduation Requirements in Basic Subject Areas, 1976-77, by size groupings according to enrollment. BEDS document June 30, 1976.

- Comparison of the number of public school districts by enrollment size categories, 1966-67 through 1976-77 school years. DPI curriculum division. One page.

- Preparation by highest degree of all classroom teachers in Iowa school districts, 1976-77, by size groupings according to enrollment. DPI curriculum. One page.

- Rural/Regional Education Association, brochure and sample publications.
  The association, dating from 1907, was founded to improve and expand educational opportunities in rural areas and smaller communities, to engage in research projects and studies and provide information concerning rural education . . . to focus attention on rural educational problems.

THIRD MEETING-- SEPTEMBER 14-15, 1977

THE SEPTEMBER MEETING opened with a presentation by two men from the extension service of Iowa State University, Art Johnson and John Tait. They illustrated and charted the process by which new ideas are adopted or rejected in a community. They pointed out factors to be considered if you wish to introduce a new concept-- for instance, sharing teachers, sharing a superintendent, sharing facilities, eliminating traditional activities, or changing school organization. Johnson is a former school board member in Oskaloosa.

HOW PEOPLE CONSIDER NEW IDEAS-- 25 YEARS OF RESEARCH AT IOWA STATE

People move through identifiable stages as they consider a new concept. First they become aware of it, then they gather information, evaluate it, try it out on a small scale if they can, and may or may not adopt it. At some stages printed information is important; at some stages the opinions of friends and neighbors are more significant. Some people adopt new ideas faster than others. Some people's decisions encourage many others to follow suit-- they may not be the earliest to change. It is possible to identify them in advance. It is important to look at the new concept with the eyes of the people in the "audience", and be aware of their yardsticks for measuring it. All these things have been determined in 25 years of research at Iowa State. Understanding the process and the considerations can give a new idea its best chance. Demonstrations of the kind given for the committee are available through the extension service.

STATE COMPTROLLER REVIEWS FUNDING TRENDS

The demonstration, workshop and discussion occupied most of the first day. In mid-afternoon, Marvin Selden, state comptroller, came in to discuss school funding. He brought data sheets showing how the average millage rate for schools, statewide, has dropped from 51.6 in 1970-71 to 41 in 1976-77 and through 1978-79. In 1970-71, property tax paid 66% of the general fund school expenses; 10% of that was repaid by credits from state funds, and another 28% came from state equalization aid and other state sources. By 1977-78, that picture shifted so that property tax carried 48% of the load, with 10.9% reimbursed from state credits and another 42% in foundation aid and other state aid.

He traced the actual fall enrollment and the formula enrollment, which allows for the weighting for special education students and the cushion for declining enrollment. He reviewed the role of the School Budget Review Committee, on which he served and the function of the allowable growth in school budgets, which is computed in his office. (Mr. Seldon resigned the office of State Comptroller in 1978.)

For the particular interest of this committee, his office supplied a list of 259 districts under 800 enrollment, and how enrollment had changed in each, over the past three years. Forty-two of the districts gained enrollment; the rest lost; the net loss was 7417 students or 5.7%, compared to a 3.7% loss in districts with more than 800 pupils. Many of the individual districts lost 12%. . . 15% . . . 18% in that three-year period.

THE HAYES PROJECT AND OTHER DEMONSTRATIONS BY IOWA CENTRAL IN AREA 5

On the second day, the committee heard about the "Hayes Project" and other cooperative education programs developed by Iowa Central Community College. Some of these are demonstration projects which have been undertaken with some grant funding from federal sources. Once the demonstration period is over, it is anticipated that they will continue under some other form of management.

Describing the programs were Dr. Edwin Barbour, superintendent, and Dr. Carl Larson, assistant superintendent, at Iowa Central, Fort Dodge.

The Hayes Project is so known because a number of secondary vocational education programs are jointly located in the former Hayes school. These include cosmetology, engine mechanics, building trades (carpentry), agri-business, health aides, pre-office occupation and clerical/secretarial education. Students attend half a day at Hayes; half a day at their local schools. Many of these programs are also offered at other centers in the Iowa Central area such as Manson, Humboldt, Pocahontas, Clarion and Rockwell City. Local districts determine how many students, and which students, they will send to these programs. Transportation is a local district responsibility. Teachers from these programs do not go out to other schools.

Thirty-five of the forty-five districts in the area are participating in the project.

TRAVELING "MASTER" TEACHERS FOR FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Another development which was discussed is the traveling "master" teacher foreign language program. A "shadow" teacher works in cooperation with the master teacher in each local school. One master teacher can handle classes in as many as six schools. A typical schedule would be three schools on Monday, Wednesday and Friday and the other three schools on Tuesday and Thursday. This schedule rotates weekly. "Shadow" teachers supervise students on other days, working with cassettes and learning packets. Four master teachers, who teach three languages in fifteen local schools in Area 5 were employed.

Another exploratory project in career education involves inservice training for teachers in local schools in the Iowa Career Education model. Staff employed by Iowa Central carry out a training process for local teachers. There are three projects operating in a three-year cycle. This project is in cooperation with the area education agency; it is anticipated that Arrowhead AEA will continue the work after the demonstration period.

EXPERIENCE-BASED CAREER EDUCATION-- STUDENTS "SHADOW" REAL OCCUPATIONS

An option for exploring careers, and relating academic school work to the "real" world of work, is Experience-Based Career Education. Fifty projects were given federal funding--one per state. Iowa Central Community College has the only rural project in the United States. At this time it was in its second year of a three-year project.

In EBCE, students go into the community--from one-fourth to a full day-- and are placed in businesses, industries, professional offices, banks, service stations or other work places. They observe or assist the person to whom they are assigned, learning first-hand what that occupation involves. They are not paid. A "learning coordinator" who is a professional teacher relates that experience to school academic assignments. The student might write a report on the experience for English class; might earn credit in bookkeeping for working with "real" store invoices; might find a science project in a barber shop, beauty shop or doctor's office. Students may explore a series of occupations in this fashion, in 13-week units. They may explore various aspects of a career. For instance, a young woman who was interested in operating a dress shop spent some time in a store, some time in a bank and some time in the employment service.

Thirty-seven schools are involved in the EBCE program. Community acceptance has been good. It opens up career exploration in small towns where there are very few paid jobs under "co-op" programs. Basic skills are required before students are allowed to go out into the community. EBCE is involved in all levels of occupation from menial to professional. "We are trying to set up a model for rural areas in the state of Iowa", Dr. Barbour said.

"Every program is evaluated every year, by outside people," Dr. Barbour pointed out. They do follow-up studies on career education to see whether the students are still in school, working in a related field, employed or unemployed.

DPI CONSULTING TEAM AVAILABLE TO LOCAL DISTRICTS

John Martin, DPI curriculum director, came back to discuss school census data and the ramifications for reorganization.

He brought in tables showing actual and projected enrollment for each county in the state, over a six-year period from 1976-77 through 1981-82. He brought the state totals showing a drop of nearly 100,000 pupils, statewide, in that period, in public and private schools-- from 662,810 in 1976-77 to 568,488 in 1981-82. The number of twelfth graders only dropped 3,000, over those six years, but the number of first-graders dropped 10,000.

He described a consulting team from DPI available to local districts without charge. It includes a finance specialist, a man acquainted with trade patterns and community "centers", a transportation specialist and himself on curriculum. They will help a district study its problems and report various options that might be workable, Martin said.

CONVERSATION AND COMMENT: SEPTEMBER, 1977

(Remarks by individual members of the committee during discussion)

"Involve the people in change. People will support what they helped to create."

"People who are pleased with their local schools may have no chance for comparison."

"Can we form some kind of overall cooperative organization?"

"What kind of high school would you really like to see?"

"We need a catalog of cooperative agreements-- a 'gourmet guide' to cooperative programs for quality education in rural Iowa."

"It will be a rare opportunity to find, first, a superintendent who will say to his neighboring superintendent, 'Hey, Joe, let's match our schedules so we can cooperate more', and, second, find the neighbor who says, 'Yes, Bill, I will.' School boards have got to put the heat on superintendents to do this . . . to match and coordinate schedules . . . so cooperation is possible, so they can share teachers and class periods."

"I think small rural schools need better guidelines and information to inform the public of the problems of our small schools. Most rural board members are not good public relations people. They cannot carry this load alone. If people are informed properly and know the problems better they will be more willing to make changes in the educational systems that we have today."

BY 1984, LARGER HIGH SCHOOLS IN AEA 5 WILL HAVE ROOM FOR SMALLER NEIGHBORS

In Area 5, during the first two years of Arrowhead AEA's existence, four reorganization proposals were received by its board of directors. In the previous ten years, there had been no petitions to any county board in that area. In all cases, declining enrollment and finances were reasons for the actions. AEA 5 set up a study committee to look at the situation on a broader scale. No recommendations had been made at this time, but an interim report was brought to the IASB committee by Harold Granner, a member of the AEA 5 committee. He is a former Humboldt County superintendent.

AEA 5 includes 46 districts, he said, and they tried fitting those districts into the various legislative proposals (minimum 600, minimum 1000, etc.) Tentative schemes for districts of 750 pupils, 1000 pupils and county-like districts all came out to 17 or 18 districts in the area.

Among other things, they noticed that by 1984 practically all of the larger high schools will have lost enough pupils so that they probably could absorb students from smaller high schools. Not by 1980, but by 1984, he said.

Since 1967, all 46 schools had lost 8600 students, or 20% on the average. Total losses from 1967 to 1984 will approach 13,000, or 30% of the original 42,000 pupils.

"Basically," he said, "I think figures of this kind are not very popular because people keep hoping for a turnaround or that the legislature will solve their problems.

"We have to take a good long look at those things which have made reorganization distasteful . . . I think we might have more good reorganization if we had a law that permitted or even required that attendance center choices be part of the proposal. Laurens and Marathon people knew in advance just where the high school, junior high and elementary would be. . .

"Most of us can cite more than one instance where the selection of the high school site, after the election, opened wounds that have taken years to heal. . .

"You could probably develop some very interesting concepts with respect to director district representation. . . to alleviate the fear that most of the present smaller districts would lose their voice. I would like to see legislation that would allow such options. . .

"With all of our know-how in other areas, it seems strange that we can't find someone smart enough to figure out a way that schools can form some sort of overall cooperative organization and still retain a good portion of their identity."

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RESOURCE MATERIALS-- ADDED IN SEPTEMBER

- Career Education for High School Students, Iowa Central Community College in cooperation with 33 local public school districts, 8 pages.

Description of the League of Schools concept and how it is working with 33 school districts. Photos. Career education programs offered, and where.

- What school did you learn in today? Iowa Central Community College, Storm Lake Center, 4 pages.

Brochure on Experience Based Career Education. Students spend from a few days to 13 weeks on a job site in the community and undertake related academic work or projects under guidance of professional teacher.

- Follow Up Study, Secondary Career Students, Iowa Central Community College, Fort Dodge, 1971-1976. Six pages, typewritten document.

- Actual Combined Census and Enrollment in Iowa Public and Nonpublic Schools by Ages and Grades, 1970-71 through 1976-77, and Projected Data 1977-78 through 1981-82. DPI Curriculum Division.

This document shows statewide enrollment, all schools, of 730,686 in 1970-71; 662,816 in 1976-77; 568,488 in 1981-82. The number of five-year-olds drops from 50,000 to 35,000 in that period.

- Funding Elementary & Secondary Education, Tabulation, State Comptroller, 2 pages.

Source of funds for school general fund budgets, by dollars and percent, 1970-71 through projection for 1978-79. State totals. Formula enrollment, actual enrollment, average millage rate, property tax credits. Statewide total funds rise from $599 million in 1970-71 to $1,114 million for 1978-79.

- Text of remarks by Harold Granner, Humboldt, former Humboldt County superintendent, member of AEA 5 study committee on reorganization. 7 pages.

- Publications of the Extension Service at Iowa State University on the Diffusion Process, How New Ideas Are Adopted and the Community Power Structure.

FOURTH MEETING-- FEBRUARY 1, 1978

IN FEBRUARY the committee met for one day, immediately preceding the first annual convention of People United for Rural Education, an organization formed in Iowa during the past year, which by then had grown to some 1200 members. Primarily a citizens' organization, but also including school board members and school administrators, PURE brought in for the convention a number of nationally known figures in rural education, and staff from states which are demonstrating a creative approach to rural education. (Its proceedings have since been published.)

ENROLLMENT WILL HIT LOW POINT IN 1982 AND THEN TURN UP AGAIN, TRUESDELL SAYS

The IASB committee first heard from Dr. Wayne P. Truesdell, professor emeritus in public school administration at the University of Northern Iowa. Before retiring in 1976, he spent 49½ years in public education, 29 as a superintendent. He has done extensive research, writing and consulting in the areas of school enrollment, staffing, facilities and finance.

He traced the history of school funding in Iowa from 1943, when state-collected taxes paid less than one percent of the total cost, to the current year, when the state portion is 58%. He outlined the LEAP study done for the Iowa legislature in 1975-76, which credited Iowa with "a level of equality probably exceeded by only three other states". He addressed the questions (1) How can the foundation formula be made flexible enough to accommodate unequal declines in enrollment among Iowa's 449 local districts? and (2) How can the formula have enough flexibility to cover the varying per pupil costs in different districts, and in different aspirations of different school communities?

He described some proposed reforms in the financing act and the foundation plan, among them (1) including taxable income as well as taxable property in the foundation, and (2) raising the support level to 95% of the state average per pupil costs and (3) allowing districts to budget up to 10% above the state average, by local decision.

He cited figures showing that small rural districts draw much less state aid per pupil than large city districts, and therefore are not a burden on the state taxpayer although they have higher per pupil costs. (47 districts under 300 enrollment = $351 state aid per pupil; 16 schools in cities with over 6000 enrollment = $772 state aid per pupil.)

Discussing population patterns, Dr. Truesdell pointed out that enrollment first peaked in Iowa in 1901, at 566,223 and then declined until 1948. It peaked again in 1969 at 659,888.

Studying birth rates and economic factors, Dr. Truesdell expects enrollment to reach a low point of 506,990 in 1982 and then turn upwards, reaching 574,314 in 1995.

The low point in births was recorded in 1973, when 38,898 babies were born, he said. There has been an upturn since then. If the fertility rate does not change there should be some further upturn, because the "baby boom" children born in 1946-64 are in the child-bearing years. Outmigration from Iowa and the high cost of rearing children probably will forestall another baby boom, he contends.

77 IOWA DISTRICTS NOW SHARING STAFF; 64 IN JOINT PROGRAM WHERE STUDENTS TRAVEL

At least 77 Iowa school districts are now sharing teachers, counselors or administrators with another district, and 64 districts are in a joint program where students are transported, the committee learned from an IASB survey.

School districts were sent a questionnaire January 4, inquiring about direct sharing agreements involving the general student body. Special education programs and arrangements involving AEA personnel were ruled out of this study. Instruction supplied through a merged area school was not included. These are direct agreements between or among local school districts.

Responses were tabulated before the end of January, when 371 districts (of 447 questioned) had replied. (Some late returns were added in subsequently.)

Most, but not all, the districts involved in cooperative programs are small. The largest number was in the Fort Dodge area, but some were reported from each of the 15 areas in Iowa. Foreign languages and vocational agriculture are the subjects most often involved.

Joint classes (students travel):

Vocational/Agriculture	35
Foreign Language	8
Science	5
Math	3
English	3
Health	3
Driver's Training	3
Career Education	3
Social Studies	1
K-6	1
Music: Elem/Sec.	2
Art: Elem/Sec.	1
Reading	1
In 64 districts, classes total	**69**

Personnel shared (staff travels):

Teachers	
Foreign Language	18
Voc/Ag	16
Art: Elem/Sec.	14
Music: Elem/Sec.	8
Social Studies	3
K-6	4
Math	3
Coaching	3
Science	2
Driver's Training	2
Career Education	1
Reading	1
G.E.D.	1
Home Economics	1
Administrative/support	47
In 77 districts, personnel shared	**124**

Guidance counselors were shared by 23 districts responding in the survey. Eight schools reported sharing librarians. Five districts reported sharing a superintendent. (DPI records show four superintendents each serving two districts.)

Generally, school administrators who completed the survey form regard cooperative agreements and shared personnel as fulfilling two purposes: a way of providing course offerings above minimum standards, and a means of meeting the minimum standards set by law. A total of 155 checked this double purpose; 96 see the sharing of resources primarily as a way to enrich curriculum above the minimum, and 46 see it primarily as a means of meeting minimum standards.

The administrators' attitudes toward sharing were set down in their own words and grouped by IASB personnel. Here are the results:

What is your opinion regarding the use of joint or cooperative educational programs and sharing of school personnel?

Good idea (excellent)	71
Effective if developed well	41
Okay if schools have similar needs to share	22
Small school needs both	20
An alternative to forestall reorganization	17
Costs less	15
Program **must** cost less or it's not worth it	13
Okay if needed to meet minimum standards	13
It works	12
Provides specialized educational opportunities	11
Broadens curriculum	11
Have mixed feelings	10
Only a partial answer	9
Teacher should travel, but not student	7
Not in favor	7
Not effective—not efficient	5
Gives a better program	5
Keeps qualified teacher in major study area	5
A waste of travel time	5
Avoid at all costs	5

What are the major obstacles to initiate joint or cooperative educational programs or sharing of school personnel with other elementary/secondary school districts?

Scheduling conflicts	80
Wasted teacher time traveling	72
Transportation of students	53
Finding suitable teacher willing to travel	35
Community wants own identity and control (pride)	34
Distance between districts	27
Student's/parent's rejection	23
Transportation costs	21
Someone must coordinate and take leadership of program (fully)	20
Negotiated master contract differences	19
Board members' attitudes	17
Teachers' attitudes	14
Causes reorganization later	13
Needs are different per school	12
Administration insecurity	10
Another school won't cooperate	10
Coordinating calendars	10
Different educational philosophies	9
Teacher loyalty factor	9
Lack of teacher supervision	8
Overloads on administration to implement and evaluate program/staff	8

ONE DISTRICT'S EXPERIENCE IN SHARING SUPERINTENDENT

A first-hand report on the process of sharing a superintendent was given the committee by one of its members, Arvid Baughman, board member at Newell-Providence community, enrollment 323. They share Supt. Morris Smith with Albert City-Truesdale, enrollment 462.

There was also discussion on sharing coaches, and the attitude of the Iowa High School Athletic Association and Iowa Girls High School Athletic Union. Several members voiced a concern that schools tend to become "wrapped up in offering every course under the sun" and neglect to stress basic education. Students who really don't know what they want to do are forced into narrow interests by the choices they must make, and avoid the stress of mastering basic liberal arts.

As the closing item for the day, committee members reviewed their thoughts about what they had learned and gave preliminary consideration to the nature of the committee report.

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CONVERSATION AND COMMENT: FEBRUARY, 1978

(Remarks by individual members of the committee during discussion)

"Small schools can survive. Let the AEAs and Voc-Techs do satellite programs . . . take the dollar burden off small schools so the schools can get back to basics . . ."

"How basic do you want to get? We don't want to go back to basics."

"Music? Art? The three R's? What about work experience?"

"We need both college oriented and career oriented. Smaller schools should concentrate curriculum and program effort to meet the need to prepare any student to (1) go to college (2) get vocational training (3) live in society, as a well rounded person."

"We don't have to come up with one plan. There may be alternatives. Iowa is unique. Same plan won't work everywhere."

"We owe something to the specials and exceptionals. They may be 20% of our students. That's harder in small schools. Are we OK with the other 80%?"

"The handicapped are taken care of. What about the gifted?"

"Where are the really small schools headed? 125 students now-- where will they be in five years?"

"There will have to be some reorganization. Some of us may have to reorganize or share even if our program is up to standards."

"There is a point where you are too small."

"Can't let programs drop beyond a certain level. . . don't want kids to suffer."

"See what kids want to take . . . Reassess the program . . . we need good counselors, to steer kids into right courses for them . . . involve the parents in scheduling . . . sharing teachers may not help if you only have three or four in each school . . ."

"Some small schools want to hold on, now, even though they know they will reorganize eventually . . . we don't want mandated reorganization."

"The bottom line is: the district has to be able to say they are maintaining a suitable program for their students."

ADDED TO RESOURCE MATERIALS: FEBRUARY

- Financing Iowa Schools: Today and Tomorrow, Dr. Wayne P. Truesdell, 18 pages

  Text of remarks to committee, plus charts and other data on enrollment and taxation, analysis of districts which are gaining enrollment, proposal for funding.

- Questionnaire and Data Report on IASB Survey, Joint or Cooperative Education Programs and Sharing of School Personnel, 4 pages

  Questionnaire issued January 4, 1978; responses from 371 districts, agreements in force and comments.

CONVERSATION AND COMMENT: DRAFTING COMMITTEE, JUNE 1978

(Remarks by individual members of the committee during discussion)

"School boards have got to take leadership in this."

"How many of us have changed our minds and taken a look at the differences?"

"Older people, say, 'We lived this way, and we made it. You can do the same.'..."

"How do you convince people that what they are doing is not fair to their children?"

"There is a point here . . . if we are honest with ourselves . . . we look at who is going to be hurt. It's the child . . . This is a board responsibility. School boards are there to represent the people in the community and the children who are being educated."

"We tend not to look in the mirror. We look at our neighbors."

"If you are just sitting there and not growing, you will be worse off."

"They say participation in small schools makes good losers out of us. That doesn't hurt. It's better for the person than winning all the time and getting into life and finding out about losing then."

"Boards of education have got to understand-- the whole key is administration . . We need aggressive administrators . . . with imagination. In rural education, the things you can do are unlimited."

"Rural school boards really need direction and guidance."

"Everybody needs to evaluate their own schools and their own outlook. I know mine changed during this study. I thought we had a pretty good school. There are things we could do to be better."

"I'm afraid, after seeing this, maybe small schools will set too long without doing anything. I would say that any school that gets under 250 should do some sharing with somebody. They have to, if they are going to give the kind of education we all think kids should have.

"This report includes the alternative of reorganization. The report should not be used as an escape for schools which have no other alternatives."

"If this report is used by the schools it is intended for, they can provide a sound education in their school longer-- but they should not allow stubbornness to deprive the children in their community of that education."

CONCLUSIONS

These conclusions represent a consensus of the committee. Some disagreement by individual committee members may exist.

OUR SEARCH for alternative methods of meeting the problems caused by declining enrollment in rural school districts has been fruitful. Many creative approaches to education are now functioning in rural Iowa, to broaden the curriculum in small districts, challenge young minds and develop vocational skills. We are particularly mindful of demonstration projects and joint agreements in area five. We think the ideas demonstrated there merit consideration by school districts, merged area schools and area education agencies throughout the state.

WE EMPHASIZE the positive aspects found in Iowa's smaller school systems in rural areas, and note that these aspects are verified by research. We see positive aspects in both the larger and smaller school systems in Iowa. They tend to be different, depending on size. Some educational offerings and activities require the resources and the larger student body of a larger district-- in this discussion, above 800 enrollment. Smaller districts (below 800 enrollment) have their own strengths. Among these strengths we perceive:

- more opportunity to participate in a variety of activities
- more opportunity to develop leadership skills
- more individual interest and help between teachers and pupils
- more satisfying personal relationships for students
- stronger community involvement with the school
- a higher level of teacher satisfaction
- higher attendance and fewer dropouts
- test scores equal to or better than students in larger districts
- more stability among graduates, in terms of further education and employment

WE CONCLUDE that so long as a satisfactory quality of education program can be maintained, the smaller districts should be allowed to function, should be encouraged and further strengthened to maintain these aspects of smaller schools which are highly valued by many families and communities.

WE RECOGNIZE the widespread and severe decline in school enrollment in Iowa, and the problems which accompany this decline. We note that some authorities expect the trend to level off and stabilize within the next decade. We think it highly

possible that some small school districts can make the necessary adjustments and adaptations, and survive the drop in enrollment.

WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE an attitude of innovation among administrators in small schools. Traditional, familiar ways of doing things are not going to work. This calls for full partnership between administrators and boards. Administrators need to take the lead, and boards need to support them. They need to work together to eliminate road blocks to cooperation with other districts, and not say "It won't work because . . .".

WE VIEW REORGANIZATION as one of the potential alternatives for school districts in which enrollment is declining. From our evaluation of the experience of districts which have reorganized, we conclude that if two small districts merge, reorganization may not save money and it does not eliminate the problems of declining enrollment. At best, it gives a "grace period" of a year or two from those problems. The reasons for reorganization should be to provide better educational opportunity than can be offered through other means.

WE DO NOT SEE MERIT in requiring reorganization on the basis of numbers of pupils, alone. A great many factors apply. The overriding consideration must be the educational program. To continue to operate, responsibly, a school district must be able to say it is maintaining a suitable program for its students, with approved curriculum and adequate quality of instruction.

THE INITIATIVE for reorganization should come from the communities and school districts which are affected. The process needs to be more flexible. It should be possible for a district to dissolve, and portions of it to realign with different neighboring districts by mutual agreement. There should be provision for continuing representation of portions of a district on the board of directors. Attendance centers should be discussed and determined in advance, so patrons may know specifically what the agreement involves. (The board of directors, of course, must retain the right to modify attendance centers later if conditions change.) Since area education agencies are mandated by law to study reorganization, the studies they undertake should involve the school districts and the boards of education that would be affected by any reorganization.

WE CONTINUE to believe that the citizens and patrons of a school system should be heavily involved in planning for the future of the school district.

SCHOOL BOARDS in smaller rural districts need to take an active role in informing persons in the community about the current situation in their schools, and any considerations for change.

CHILDREN should have the opportunity for education reasonably near their homes. Participation in school activities outside regular classroom hours is an important aspect of the growth and development of young people. Distance between home and school should not be so great that travel time is a barrier between the student and activities outside school hours. Reorganization of school districts may not be an appropriate solution for sparsely populated areas.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS in Iowa need not be uniform to be equitable. Various communities across the state have unique needs and aspirations. Each individual student comes from unique circumstances and has a personal potential. There can be a number of different ways for a community school system to offer educational opportunities appropriate for its young people.

SMALLER SCHOOL DISTRICTS need to be forceful in identifying services they desire from regional agencies, and in requesting agreements for those services from area educational agencies and merged area schools.

SMALLER SCHOOL DISTRICTS, operating under today's conditions, should not retreat to "the basics" in education, but should concentrate on offering all essential elements of a basic foundation of education for young people in the district, equipping them to function as well-rounded persons in society, and to profit from further vocational training or from higher education, according to their individual plans and talents. The curriculum should be flexible enough to respond to the expressed interests of any reasonable group of students, and it should provide access to specialized individual needs and interests through cooperative agreements, regional agencies or some other means.

THERE IS A NEED for teacher education oriented toward smaller rural districts, including practice teaching in such districts and an understanding of how to use resources available to them to maintain and enhance educational opportunity.

FUNDING FOR SCHOOLS in Iowa needs to be changed to recognize the fixed costs which continue despite declining enrollment, and to provide more options for maintaining adequate education programs in small districts.

THERE IS A STRONG NEED for a continuing resource file and consulting service for smaller rural districts. It should make conveniently available to rural districts the kind of information and knowledge which has come to this committee in the course of our study. It should include a continuing catalog of demonstration projects, sharing agreements, cooperative programs and innovations currently underway or under consideration among rural school districts, and technical advice from consultants who are oriented to the needs, strengths and possibilities in smaller rural school districts. We first considered establishing such a service as part of the Iowa Association of School Boards. We eventually concluded that the most appropriate place for such a service would be the State Department of Public Instruction, because it is the repository of statistical information about school districts, it includes divisions of curriculum and transportation which are among the special concerns of rural districts, it has broad resources including computer capacity, it has statutory authority in the area of reorganization and is charged by law with maintaining standards and a list of approved schools.[1]

THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS of every small rural school district need to take a thoughtful look at the direction of its educational program, and what steps may need to be taken to assure a suitable education for its young people. While we recognize that no one can see accurately down the road to the future, we are obligated to look down that road, exercise our best judgment and do responsible planning. At this time, especially, every school district needs a good ten-year plan, along the lines of Section 280.12. Education is an exciting thing. There are many things a rural district can do to keep it exciting, contemporary and sound. We need to be sure that we, as adults, through stubbornness or refusal to change, are not depriving our children of tomorrow.

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1 One member of the committee, reviewing the draft of this report, commented that the Area Education Agencies might be a more appropriate place than the DPI for the small rural school resource file and advisory function.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

REQUIRING LEGISLATIVE ACTION:

1. That there be established within the State Department of Public Instruction a Rural Education Advisory Group, whose stated purpose would be to collect and share information about educationally sound and workable ways to maintain quality of instruction and suitable curriculum in rural school districts. That this group would offer consulting service, on request, for local districts on the most feasible ways to carry out the individual district's educational objectives within its resources. Personnel assigned to this advisory group should have a background of service on rural school boards as well as in the teaching profession or administrative field.

2. That funding for schools be modified to compensate fixed costs which persist as enrollment declines.

3. That the process for reorganization of school districts be modified so that existing districts need not reorganize as a unit, but may dissolve and regroup with various districts by mutual agreement.

REQUIRING ACTION BY BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF INDIVIDUAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS:

4. We charge our fellow school board members, individually and collectively, to realistically look at the finished product going out of the school into society, and consider whether the young people are equipped to be good citizens in today's world.

5. We urge our fellow school board members, in each individual district to develop a five- or ten-year plan for meeting the problems of declining enrollment and make that plan known to the patrons of the district so they may anticipate probable changes.

6. We urge our fellow school board members to become aware of the ways in which curriculum can be enriched and instruction enhanced through cooperative or joint agreements, staff of area education agencies, facilities of merged area schools, or other resources. We urge them to actively seek to augment their local staff and facilities through these means, as appropriate locally, and to specifically request the cooperation they desire from their own area education agency or merged area school, or both.

7. We urge our fellow school board members to personally take an active role in informing persons in their communities about the current situation in their schools, and the considerations behind any changes the board contemplates, and continuously invite and listen to community reaction.

REQUIRING ACTION BY BOARDS OF DIRECTORS OF AREA EDUCATION AGENCIES AND MERGED AREA SCHOOLS:

8. That boards of directors of area education agencies and merged area schools urge their staffs to actively solicit from local school boards and administrators the perceived needs in curriculum and staffing which might be beneficially met on a cooperative or shared basis, and suggest ways of supplying appropriate services within the framework of local management of the school districts.

9. That boards of directors of area education agencies and merged area schools urge their staffs to study services now offered to individual smaller rural school districts by other AEAs and merged area schools and consider whether these arrangements are applicable to school districts within their own areas.

10. That board of directors of area education agencies establish, by policy, that staff studies of reorganization within the area shall be done jointly with the boards of directors and staff of individual school districts affected.